



NREDA News Brief | August 2026

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President's Message

By Karla Organist, President, National Rural Economic Developers Association



Elevating Innovation from the Ground Up: Salt Lake City is Calling!

My first NREDA Annual Conference was in 2018 in St. Petersburg, Florida. As a total newcomer, I naturally gravitated to the lowans I already knew. We bonded over the week, which helped me build a stronger state network - but over the years, something even bigger has happened. Yes, I was a hesitant newbie at that first conference, but I've attended every conference since, and my professional network has been elevated far beyond my state contacts to include a nationwide family!

Looking back, I see how the magic happened. My journey with NREDA truly built itself from the ground up. I might have arrived feeling a bit unsure, but members pulled me into the fold. It started small: *attend conference, meet more people, learn great stuff, and repeat*. Then I elevated my engagement: I joined a committee, ran for a board position and got elected, joined the Executive Committee, and today, I have the honor of serving as President!

[Click Here to Read More about the NREDA Annual Conference](#)

2026 NREDA Professional Development Scholarship

The National Rural Economic Developers Association (NREDA) is now accepting self-nominations for the 2026 Professional Development Scholarship Program.

The scholarship program recognizes the importance of training and education, as well as networking, in the field of Economic Development. The program is open to NREDA members and non-members with a focus on those new to the economic development profession.

Four scholarships will be awarded in 2026 and include a complimentary registration to the NREDA Annual Conference to be held November 4-6, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT. Additionally, if non-members are selected, a 2026 NREDA membership (for the remainder of the year) will also be included. Priority in selection will be given to those who have not attended a past NREDA Annual Conference.

Application submissions for the NREDA 2026 Professional Development Scholarship are due August 14, 2026.

Find out More and Apply Here

2026 NREDA Awards Recognition Program

Submit your nomination by August 14th for the **2026 NREDA Awards Recognition Program**! In recognition of outstanding leadership in the field of rural economic development, the National Rural Economic Developers Association honors deserving individuals across America. 2026 awards recognition will be presented in conjunction with the NREDA Annual Conference November 4-6 in Salt Lake City!

Application submissions for the NREDA 2026 Awards Recognition Program are due August 14, 2026.

Find out More and Apply Here

2026 NREDA Annual Conference

Plan to Join us in Salt Lake City, UT this November for the 2026 NREDA Annual Conference November 4-6, 2026!

Register for the 2026 Annual Conference Here!

[Click Here](#) to View the Schedule-At-A-Glance

Hotel & Venue

Join us at the [Salt Lake City Marriott City Center](#), 220 South State St., Salt Lake City, UT 84111.

[Reserve your hotel room now](#) through **October 12, 2026**. Be sure to reserve early to receive the discounted rate of \$224 per night. Reservations at the discounted rate are available for the nights of November 2 - 7, 2026.

Sponsorship Opportunities & Exhibitor Information

[Click Here](#) to View Sponsorship & Exhibitor Opportunities.

[Click Here](#) to Become a 2026 Annual Conference Sponsor!

For more information, visit the [2026 NREDA Annual Conference page](#).

**NREDA****NATIONAL.
RURAL.
CONNECTED.****Join Us
November 4-6, 2026
Salt Lake City, UT****NREDA Annual Conference:
Elevating Innovation from the Ground Up**

30 Day AI Challenge 2.0



Are you ready to innovate with technology? Step into the spotlight and spend 30 days with AI in a fun and friendly competition encouraging NTCA and NREDA members to explore and implement AI applications that support rural economic development.

[Click Here for a Tutorial Video and Additional Information](#)

Presented by NTCA - The Rural Broadband Association and the National Rural Economic Developers Association (NREDA)



Industry Updates

Economic Development Whitepapers: Free Resources & Best Practices for Economic Developers Provided by Golden Shovel Agency

Stay on top of economic development trends. Golden Shovel researches, tests, and compiles best practices and strategies into our eBooks, whitepapers, guides, and toolkits for economic developers! Each Golden Shovel whitepaper includes original research, data on hot topics, best practices that are working, and strategies you can implement immediately. Download these resources for free!

[Click Here for Golden Shovel Whitepapers](#)

Upcoming Webinars

Webinar

Don't Just Lock the Digital Door: A Whole-House Approach to Cybersecurity

 **11 AM ET/10 AM CT**
August 25, 2026

 nreda.org/webinars


Frank Bezak


Kevin Brummer

[Get More Info and Register Here](#)

"Don't Just Lock the Digital Door: A Whole-House Approach to Cybersecurity"
Tuesday, August 25, 2026
11:00 a.m. ET / 10:00 a.m. CT

Cybersecurity can feel complicated, but the basics are easier to understand when you think of your organization like a house. You need strong locks, clear rules for who gets a key, alarms that alert you when something looks wrong, regular upkeep and a plan if there's a break-in.

In this webinar, GBS will walk through practical cybersecurity best practices using a simple house metaphor. Attendees will learn how to spot common risks, strengthen everyday defenses, reduce the chance of ransomware or phishing damage, and build a basic response plan. The session is designed for business leaders, economic development professionals, municipal partners and community organizations that need straightforward guidance without heavy technical jargon.

Webinars are a member-benefit to current (2026) NREDA members; this webinar is free for non-members.

New Member Spotlight

Learn more about NREDA's new members, and welcome **Kiyana James** to the NREDA community!

Kiyana James serves as Chief Member Relations Officer at Black River Electric Cooperative (BREC) in South Carolina, where her executive portfolio includes government relations, key accounts, public relations, communications, and member services. A Certified Key Accounts Executive (CKAE) through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), Kiyana has built her career around cultivating strategic relationships, understanding the evolving needs of members and communities, and connecting those needs with opportunities and resources.



BREC serves members across Sumter, Kershaw, Lee, and Clarendon counties, a largely rural region of S.C. where the cooperative's role extends beyond providing reliable electricity. As a trusted community partner, BREC is uniquely positioned to connect people, resources, and opportunities that contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life of the region.

The natural connection between relationship building, cooperative leadership, and community growth is what drew Kiyana to NREDA. Since joining, she has already become actively involved with NREDA's Rural Issues Committee, connecting with peers who share her interest in strengthening rural communities. Her experience has reinforced the importance of listening, anticipating needs, and building long-term partnerships—principles she believes are equally important to successful rural economic development. Through NREDA, Kiyana hopes to broaden her perspective on how cooperatives can more intentionally support business growth and retention, workforce development, community investment, and regional collaboration. Ultimately, she wants to bring more to the table for the communities BREC serves by leveraging new relationships, resources, and ideas to enhance the member and community experience and create sustainable economic opportunities with impact that extends well into the future.

NREDA Podcast



NATIONAL. RURAL. CONNECTED.

In case you missed it, listen below to the July podcast! In this episode, we visit with Ecostrat's Ryan Magwood and Justin Bryce on how Biofuel Development Opportunity (BDO) Zones can impact rural communities by tapping into agriculture projects.

Listen to the July Podcast Here!

Listen below to the August podcast! In this episode, guest host Jay Buchholz from Sioux Valley Energy speaks with WorkBright CEO Chapelle Ryon on how remote work is impacting and benefiting rural communities.

Listen to the August Podcast Here!

Podcast Submission Form

BPC Economic Development Childcare Cohort

Childcare plays a critical role in supporting economic growth and workforce participation. To help in researching what EDOs would like to see in this cohort, [BPC is seeking input from Economic Development Organizations.](#)

The Bipartisan Policy Center is researching an Economic Development Child Care Cohort to launch in 2027: a peer-learning initiative that equips state and local economic development organizations (EDOs) to treat child care as a core economic development tool, particularly for workforce retention, and connects them to the trusted child care experts already doing that work in their state. The

goal is not to build new child care programs or duplicate existing technical assistance; it is to align two systems, economic development and child care, that too rarely sit at the same table.

Please complete and share this brief survey - your feedback is encouraged. For more information, please contact Sheri Penney, Fellow with The Bipartisan Policy Center at spenney@bipartisanpolicy.org.

[Click Here to Complete the BPC Survey](#)

Strategic Partner NTCA Makes the Case for Broadband and Rural Success at the FCC

Rural broadband policy is often discussed within the context of deploying networks. Last week, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, a strategic partner of NREDA, filed comprehensive [comments](#) at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) demonstrating the critical role of broadband for rural success.

[Read More Here](#)

Join one of NREDA's Committees

If you have any interest in being a part of an NREDA Committee, please complete the Committee Interest Form below and the committee chairperson will reach out to you for further discussion.

Committee Interest Form

To learn more about each committee, please [CLICK HERE](#)

NREDA Retiree Recognition

NREDA would like to recognize our members for their service! If you will be retiring this year, or know someone who is retiring from the industry, please complete the form below by October 16, 2026 to be recognized during the NREDA Annual Conference November 4-6, 2026 in Salt Lake City, Utah! (Annual Conference registration will open Summer 2026, so be sure to look for that information and register to attend the conference).

Retiree Recognition Form

Newsletter Submissions

Call for Newsletter Articles

NREDA would love to share your unique stories, industry trends, best practices, white papers, and - of course - your successes in our bi-monthly e-newsletter!

Guidelines:

- You must be a current NREDA member to submit an article.
- Please email your article to Sydney Spears at sydney@assnoffices.com by the 15th of each e-newsletter month. Please include the subject line **NREDA Newsletter Article Submission**
- Please submit your article in an editable format (Microsoft Word or text in the body of an email preferred). Feel free to include a photo with your article.
- Please send information, educational, and/or newsworthy items. Please no ads or sales/marketing articles. NREDA reserves the right to exclude submitted articles as deemed necessary by the leadership.

Submit a Newsletter Article

Connect with Us

Facebook

Instagram

LinkedIn

#NREDA Don't forget when posting on social media to use the hashtag #NREDA when sharing your stories! This way we can spread it to all of our members!



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